



MCMEX 2000

Singapore hosted the first WESTERN PACIFIC MINE COUNTERMEASURE Exercise (MCMEX 2001). In port are two Singapore Navy patrol boats, the RSS *Brave* (95) and RSS *Daring* (98). Two U.S. Navy Avenger-class mine countermeasures ships are berthed behind them: the USS *Patriot* (MCM-7) and USS *Guardian* (MCM-5).

PHOTO BY PH2 ERIN A. ZOCCO, USN



Multinational Mine Countermeasure Exercise in Singapore

By Asia-Pacific Defense FORUM Staff

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For the first time, 14 Asia-Pacific navies, including the U.S. Navy, joined in a multinational naval exercise aimed at helping to maintain the safety of international waterways. About 1,500 participants representing the 14 navies gathered in Singapore. The exercise – 1st WESTERN PACIFIC MINE COUNTERMEASURE Exercise (MCMEX) 2001 – was the first multinational exercise of its kind. In fact, it was the largest naval exercise, in terms of numbers of participating countries, ever held in the region.

PHOTO BY LT. J. G. JOHN PERKINS, USN



Republic of Singapore Navy Col. Kevin Santa-Maria, Commander of Coastal Command, answers reporters' questions at the MCMEX opening ceremony.

PHOTO BY PH2 ERIN A. ZOCCO, USN



Rear Adm. Masami Kawamura, Commander, Mine Warfare Force, Japan Maritime Self-Defense Force (JMSDF), is accompanied by two JMSDF officers en route to the USS *Inchon* (MCS-12) on a U.S. Navy MH-53E helicopter.

The exercise was hosted by the Republic of Singapore Navy at Tuas Naval Base and conducted in the Straits of Singapore and the South China Sea. (Singapore also hosted a simultaneous gathering for the 1st Western Pacific Diving Exercise.) The exercise area was doubly valuable to participants because it provided a real and busy environment of commercial ships and fishing vessels, and because it took place in the most likely area for a future multinational contingency.

Fifteen naval ships from six of the participating countries provided the vessels for exercise training. These were:

- Australia: HMAS *Hawkesbury* and HMAS *Huon*
- Indonesia: KRI *Pulau Rangsang*, KRI *Pulau Rondo* and KRI *Pulau Rupert*
- Japan: JDS *Bungo*, JDS *Tobishima* and JDS *Yaeyama*
- Singapore: RSS *Katong* and RSS *Punggol*
- Thailand: HTMS *Bang Rachang* and HTMS *Nong Sarai*
- USA: USS *Inchon*, USS *Guardian* and USS *Patriot*

Another eight countries were represented by naval personnel who were hosted aboard the other six countries' ships as exercise participants or as exercise observers. These countries were:

- China
- France
- India
- Korea
- Malaysia
- Papua New Guinea
- Russia
- Vietnam

The 12-day exercise took place in June 2001. MCMEX involved explosive ordnance disposal (EOD) personnel from several countries, whose missions were to neutralize mines that would impede traffic on these vital sea-lanes of communication. U.S. Navy Rear Adm. Jose Betancourt, Commander, Mine Warfare Command, called MCMEX "one of



A U.S. Navy Explosive Ordnance Disposal (EOD) specialist demonstrates EOD equipment used to find and neutralize mines.

the most important exercises . . . conducted in the Western Pacific."

The U.S. Navy contribution included MH-53E mine-hunting helicopters from Texas and Virginia and EOD divers from bases in Guam and California. The participation of the U.S. Navy Mine



A U.S. Navy MH-53E helicopter demonstrates U.S. mine sweeping to MCIMEX participants and observers aboard the USS *Inchon* (MCS-12).



A Singapore Air Force Super Puma helicopter (below) and an Indonesian Navy NB-105 reconnaissance helicopter (left) conduct deck landing qualifications aboard the USS *Inchon* (MCS-12) during MCMEX 2001.



PHOTOS BY PH2 AARON L. LANE, USN

Countermeasures Command and Control ship USS *Inchon* (MCS 12) in this exercise marked its first deployment to the Western Pacific. The USS *Inchon*, the only mine countermeasures command and control ship that embarks mine hunting helicopters, employed its

capability for refueling and replenishing at sea to allow the USS *Patriot* (MCM 7) and USS *Guardian* (MCM 5) to remain on station during the exercise, while other ships had to return to port to refuel and take on supplies. The *Patriot* and *Guardian* are based in Japan. The *Inchon* also provided a cohesive tactical command and control picture of the operation, a capability unique to this ship.

During initial unit-level training, regional ships and crews practiced safety procedures and learned how each navy performed mine countermeasures operations. During the tactical phase, ships, helicopters and EOD personnel practiced the actual location, identification, and neutralization of exercise mines.

The exercise is a general outgrowth of the growing cooperation among Western Pacific navies in the Western Pacific Naval Symposium (WPNS). The

Naval officers from 13 foreign countries aboard the USS *Inchon* (MCS-12) observe a demonstration of U.S. Navy minesweeping techniques by an MH-53E helicopter. Participants were from: Australia, China, France, India, Indonesia, Japan, Republic of Korea, Malaysia, Papua New Guinea, Russia, Singapore, Thailand, and Vietnam.



Lt. Saposhi Shibuya of the JMSDF discusses aviation mine sweeping techniques with U.S. Navy Lt. Kaz Olmeda while aboard the USS *Inchon* (MCS-12).

WPNS was established in 1988 to promote mutual understanding and naval cooperation in the Western Pacific and works to enhance maritime safety. This is the first time that WPNS nations have participated together in a combined exercise.

The exercise is specifically the result of a decision made at the WPNS Second Mine Countermeasure Seminar hosted by the Republic of Singapore Navy in November 2000. The exercise was first proposed by Singapore at the First Mine Countermeasure Seminar in 1999.

Singapore's Minister of State for Defence and Information and the Arts, David T. E. Lim, during his opening ceremony speech, pointed out that half of the world's shipping tonnage passes through the Singapore and Malacca Straits and South China Sea, tonnage that will grow five percent per year over the next 10 years. Singapore, which is highly dependent on these vital sea lines of communications, has become a regional leader in multilateral coopera-

tion that promotes peace and security in the region.

At his welcoming address, Singapore's Commander of Coastal Command, Col. Kevin Santa-Maria, highlighted the degree of cooperation that went into organizing a multilateral exercise involving so many different navies. He said, "the main factor that contributed to materialization . . . was the ability of the participants to cooperate with one another and put aside their own preferences." He noted, "Many compromises were made and a give-and-take attitude was always prevalent."

He cited Indonesia as an example of cooperation. Because there was insufficient space in the Singapore Straits to accommodate all the ships, the Singapore Navy asked the Indonesian Navy to allow certain areas of their waters in the South China Sea to be used for littoral, exercise mine countermeasure operations. Rear Adm. Si Putu Ardana, Commander-in-Chief of the

Western Fleet, granted the request. Indonesia also made available its emergency evacuation capabilities and hospital on Bintan Island to the exercise participants.

Exercise goals, according to Col. Santa-Maria, were "to establish good relationships between the navies of the WPNS, to build and foster mutual cooperation with a view toward interoperability, and to explore opportunities for cooperation in the humanitarian mine countermeasure effort."

These goals and more were achieved during the combined activities of the largest flotilla of regional naval vessels ever gathered for a combined exercise. As Minister Lim concluded, "This exercise has strengthened our region's collective ability to deal with one of the most pressing concerns of our time – safety of navigation." □



MCMEX successfully brought together the collective expertise of 14 regional navies. Indonesian Navy 2nd Lt. Didik Setiyawan is interviewed by the press during the first multinational mine countermeasure exercise ever held in the Asia-Pacific region.